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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 001499

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA. NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2024
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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

REF: JERUSALEM 1256

Classified By: Deputy Principal Officer Greg Marchese for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. Plans for demolitions and new Israeli construction in several East Jerusalem Palestinian neighborhoods are progressing, according to local legal and NGO contacts. Demolitions in Al Bustan and Abasiya could move ahead at any time, they claimed. Islamic Waqf contacts expressed concern about Jewish extremists entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount on August 22, the third such incursion in two months. End Summary.

UPDATES ON PENDING PROPERTY ISSUES IN EAST JERUSALEM

12. (C) Ref A reported on nine property cases that could affect the demographic balance in East Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods. Since that update, developments have occurred in several cases, according to post contacts:

-- Shepherd Hotel: Developers are gathering necessary certifications to begin construction of 20 apartment units at the site in Shaykh Jarrah, and the Municipality has not responded to USG requests to freeze that project. A high-profile visit by former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee on August 17 led to a demonstration by Peace Now, as well as a counter-demonstration by inter-campus Zionist organization Ir Tirtzu.

-- Ras al Amud Police Station: The Municipality is currently reviewing blueprints for a new neighborhood at the former police station on the Mount of Olives, according to Haim Ehrlich of the Jerusalem-based NGO Ir Amim. Developers plan to submit the blueprints (which include 110 new housing units, a country club, a kindergarten, and a synagogue) to the Local Planning Committee in the near future. Despite Israeli press reports on these plans on August 23, Ir Amin Director Danny Seidemann told post that opposition inside the municipal bureaucracy will delay this project for some time, though he described its eventual approval as a "foregone conclusion" absent a political decision to stop it.

-- Al Bustan: Jerusalem attorney Ziad Kavar told post on August 18 that the Municipality floated an unofficial plan to give permits to all but 15 homes in Silwan's al Bustan neighborhood. Jerusalem Councilman Meir Margalit told post on August 24 that residents are planning to refuse the proposal. Margalit said he fears the Municipality will then move ahead with demolition of all 88 homes.

-- Abasiya (Abu Tor): Kavar said the Municipality has refused to engage in negotiations on 34 apartments scheduled for demolition. The demolitions could move ahead at any time, he said.

13. (SBU) In addition to these developments in Arab

neighborhoods, Seidemann confirmed press reports that the Israel Lands Authority has decided to accept "appeals" of 450 failed tenders in East Jerusalem's Israeli neighborhood of Pisgat Ze'ev.

PROVOCATIONS AT THE HARAM AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT

14. (SBU) Islamic Waqf officials told PolSpec that over a dozen Jewish extremists entered the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount on August 22 to hold "provocative" religious rituals. The Waqf officials noted that the incident was the third in the past two months. Former Jerusalem Mufti Sheikh Ikrima Sabri condemned the incident in a separate telcon, noting the timing of the incident fell on the first day of Ramadan. Former PA Jerusalem Affairs Minister Hatem Abdel Qader criticized what he described as the complicity of Israeli National Police in allowing this and previous incidents.

WALLES